

An Interview With

HORATIO "RAY" FITCH

January 9, 1985

Horatio "Ray" Fitch was interviewed on January 9, 1985, at the Estes Park Area Historical Museum and at the Fitch Cabin in Allenspark, Colorado. Mel Busch and Ted Schmidt conducted the interview.

The tapes are on file at the Estes Park Public Library and may be checked out. The reader should keep in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written word.

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Interview with Horatio "Ray" Fitch (HF)
Date of Interview: January 9, 1985
Interviewers: Mel Busch (MB)
Ted Schmidt (TS)

Begin Tape A, Side 1

HF Well, I'm eighty-four years old. I was born in 1900 on the west side of Chicago and grew up on the west side of Chicago. Fortunately, I was athletic enough to have qualified for the 1924 Olympic Games, which seems to be the only famous thing that I've ever done in my life.

I went to the games in Paris, France, the summer of 1924 and was running in the four hundred meters, which in this country is called the quarter mile. They are almost exactly the same length. And I was fortunate enough, though I didn't know it at the time, to run against the famous Eric Liddell, whose history was shown in the movie picture, "Chariots of Fire." Actually, I'm in that movie picture, at least an actor playing my part, who was famous only for the fact that he came in second always to Eric Liddell.

MB O.K. Now, we've got your basic background, what you did in 1924, and now your name is Horatio Fitch, right?

HF That is correct, except for the fact that when I was in high school, a man who couldn't say Horatio picked the second syllable and called me "Ray." And I've been called Ray almost ever since.

MB O.K. Good! Well, Ray, as far as your life then, it began when?

HF In 1900 I was born.

TS Could you tell us something about your family?

HF My family were originally New Englanders. The original Fitch in this country came over to Boston in 1630 or 1632. I don't remember which it is, and there has been a Fitch line ever since. They moved to Vermont and were farmers in Vermont until about the middle of the eighteen hundreds slightly before the Civil War when my grandfather and grandmother, but separately, came to the Chicago area. Actually, my grandmother came as a fourteen year old girl to the Milwaukee area, and then at sixteen she moved to Chicago and became a schoolteacher. At sixteen yet! My grandfather met her when she was a schoolteacher, married her, and they had their first child in 1862. That was my father. Their second child was a year or two later, but she died as a young person, maybe a seventeen year old girl, in Longmont, Colorado, which is rather surprising. She is buried in the Longmont cemetery. Her gravestone is still there. Apparently she died of tuberculosis, at that young age.

MB And your father's name was--?

*For the purpose of indicating unclear words that could not be transcribed, ellipses (...) have been used throughout this manuscript.

- HF My father's name--well, my family is all physicians. My grandfather, who died in 1908, I think, was Kelvin May Fitch. My father, who was also a physician, was Walter May Fitch. My oldest sister is Edith May Fitch, and unfortunately, my name is actually Horatio May Fitch. You see, May is a family name in our family.
- MB Is that from a maiden name of someone back in the line?
- HF I never really found out just what the connection is, but Horatio Nelson May was my father's first cousin. Yes, it is a family name by connection that way, and that's where I got my name. I'm named after Horatio Nelson, the famous English admiral by two..., which was fortunate for me because when I was named Horatio Nelson May, the original Horatio May put in his will a five hundred dollar donation towards my college. Of course, I was not quite ready for college at that time. He died when I was two years old, and actually that five hundred dollars had increased so much that by the time I got to the university it practically put me through four years of university. Costs were not as great at that time.
- MB That's great.
- TS What was your life like growing up on the west side of Chicago?
- HF Well, frankly I think that our life was just ordinary. We were not slum people; the west side of Chicago at that time had been a very fashionable part of the city. But by the time that my folks married and started having their children, it was on the down grade. My--the home that I remember all my life was a big house, but it was not the kind of a house that an ordinary practicing physician of just ordinary means would have had. I went to Brown School. That Brown School has one famous situation. When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, his wife later took their son Tad Lincoln to Chicago and lived in that area. Tad Lincoln went to Brown School. So, there are two famous people from Brown School!
- TS And where did you go to high school?
- HF I went to high school at Crane Tech, which was actually officially Richard T. Crane Technical High School, Chicago. It was about a mile from our place. It was an all boys' high school, so ... I never had a date until after I'd graduated from high school because we went to an all boys' high school.
- MB And being a technical high school, was this preparing a person for a technical career, or was that just--
- HF Theoretically, it was preparing for a technical career, but in the early 1900's a technical career meant being a fellow that works in a shop somewhere, not the kind of technical career that we might have now. I can tell you what courses we had to take. We had foundry, we had forge shop, we had electrical shop, and, of course, we had drafting. One of the provisions when Richard T. Crane gave the money for the high school was that they do not teach Latin. He, for some reason, had a thing against Latin, so we had our choice of either French or German.

HF We had to take one foreign language, but not Latin.

TS What kind of medical practice did your father have?

HF My father and my grandfather were both general practitioners, which were about the only type of medicine except if you happened to be a surgeon. That was different, but otherwise, you were just the kind of family doctor that went out nights and delivered babies from three o'clock in the morning. I can remember him coming in late at night very frequently.

TS Did he have something special in your house though in terms of his medical practice?

HF My father and my grandfather both were trying to find new ways of treating things, and they had electrical contrivances which were the big thing. Electricity was new then, and they had--well, I don't remember. One thing I don't know what it was supposed to do, but the patient sat in a chair while they shot volts through the patient which didn't kill him, but must have been rather painful.

Yes, he tried two things: this electrical thing and another thing which was a cabinet about the size of a bed only covered over with electric globes all around it so that the patient inside had a hot bath, you might say it was. And that was supposed to do good for patients that had bad legs or sore shoulders, or something like that. It wasn't that they were trying to do sloppy work; they were just trying to find the answers. And nowadays physicians do that, but they're a little more sophisticated.

TS Did you have kind of a hospital in your house, too, at that one time?

HF Our house had three or four treatment rooms, and my father--I don't talk much about my grandfather because he died when I was about eight years old. I remember him. I remember he had a beard clear down to his tummy button, but I knew from being around my father's work. He had about two or three nurses, and they had these treatment rooms, and he was very much in favor of exercises. I know that he gave me and my older brother--had the nurses give us exercises when we were growing up. I can remember when I was four or five years old that I did setting-up exercises such as athletes do now.

MB That got things off to a good start, didn't it?

HF Yes.

MB Well, they're now coming back to realizing that that's some of the best medicine, too.

HF I might say that my older brother was also intrigued with medicine, and he was the third generation. When I came along ready to go to college, everybody just assumed that I was going to be a doctor, too. I said, "To heck with it!" I never had the bedside manner, and I liked things that I could see where you could see that this thing was bound to happen because it was just the logical thing. So I took engineering, and I've never been sorry that I did take civil engineering in college.

TS Did you have course work when you were in high school that tended to lead you into engineering?

HF Well, actually only as far as engineering drafting is concerned. Because there were four technical high schools in Chicago, Crane High School and Lane High School were exactly alike. Anything that I said of Crane was the same at Lane. Harrison High School was different in that it was a technical high school for both men and women. Now, I don't know what the women's courses were, but it was something technical, probably had to do with homemaking. Then, there was the Lucy Flower High School, which was entirely women: and all they taught there was home management, actually. I can't say that my high school taught us very much about engineering, but it gave us the idea--the sense of engineering so that there was practically no question when you went to college that you were going to take engineering courses. It might be mechanical engineering or electrical engineering or in my case, civil engineering.

MB Where did you go to college?

HF I went for the first two years to Crane Junior College because it was in the same building, and so I went six years to the same building. I had there all of the engineering subjects: surveying and the first two years' courses in engineering curricula. Then, after two years--it was a junior college--I moved to the University of Illinois. I graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

TS What year was that?

HF I graduated in 1923. Actually, I was supposed to graduate in 1922. See, I graduated from high school in 1918. I got a certificate from the junior college in 1920, and I was originally in the class of '22 at Illinois. But there were so many things that the high school hadn't had that we should have that I had to back up, so I went to Illinois for two and a half years instead of going for just two, and graduated in 1923.

TS Before we get into college, let's go back to high school and a little earlier. What kind of athletic activities did you have that led you into running?

HF It's hard to remember just where I got started because frankly I've always been interested in running because I could usually do it so well. In grammar school, Brown School, they had a big play yard there which was actually bricked over so it wasn't very good for running on, but at least we did. About once or twice a week, they'd get twenty or thirty boys at one end of the yard, and we'd run to the other end, which was about a half a block away, and see who'd win. Frankly, most of the time I'd win even if there were bigger boys than I was. That gave me a pretty good idea of what I'd like to do. So, when I went to high school, my first year I didn't try any running because just being in high school is enough of a job. At least I found it so. The second year in high school I did go out for the track team and made it in the high jump. I was always a good high-jumper as well as a runner.

- HF I'd say that my father was against boys running long distances. Nowadays they run five, ten miles, and he thought that would be just bad on their hearts. Whether it is or not, I don't know--they do it now. I'm not saying that he said, "You can't go out for distances," but he recommended in a family way that it wouldn't be good. So, my sophomore year in high school I went out for the high jump, and I had the distinction of having tied for last place in the Chicago High School Track Meet. I have a record of one-fifth of a point from the Chicago High School for that track meet!
- TS It wasn't a very distinguished beginning then! What did your college career then?
- HF Let's go back to high school!
- TS O.K.
- HF In my junior year I went out for sprints. My father said that was all right. The sprints wouldn't hurt anybody, and I ran the 50, 100, and 220. That's all I did run. I had the distinction of running on a 250 mile track because in that year, 1917, they built a track which was going to be better than Indianapolis. They built it in Maywood, which is a suburb of Chicago, just to the west of Chicago, and the peculiar thing about it was that it wasn't brick as Indianapolis is, but it was entirely wood, logs--not logs, but 3x6's and things like that for the driving surface. It was brand new in May of 1917, and I suspect because the war was on at that time, that they figured that they'd better have an auto meet there before the war took over everything.
- So they figured a 500-mile auto race at the new track just west of Chicago, and for publicity among other things, they invited the Chicago track athletes to hold their meet there in the morning before the race had been run at all. And so we ran on a wooden track, and I ran the 100 and 220. I think I got something like second in the 220 because I was a pretty good man then. I don't know what I got in the 100, but that was my second year. Remembering that that was when the United States was in the war--I was sixteen at the time.
- TS Did you have specialized equipment that you used, like shoes?
- HF Very definitely. We had very short shoes, and I've run on wooden tracks, indoors and outdoors. And there is a special spike that is probably less than a quarter of an inch long and sharp so that you don't notice the wood. It just gives you a good clutch on the track. I remember as I ran the 100 and then I came back to run the 220, I was the last one there. One of the officials said, "Umph, you shouldn't be in this sprinters, you can't even get here on time for the race!" So, I ran the race, and as I said, I got second. I went back to get my sweat clothes, and the official said, "Umph, whatcha get?" I said, "I got second." He said, "Oh, you're not so slow after all!"
- TS Was there anything special about your life during the war years in Chicago?

HF Yes. So, let's go back to high school. I had a curtailed program in my senior year, and by that time my father had thought that I could run longer than sprints. So, I went out for the quarter mile, and, actually, in the indoor meet--they never had an outdoor meet because of the war. In the indoor meet I ran my first competition in the quarter mile and won the quarter mile in my first competition, so that I felt pretty good about that. I was also high jumping at the same time. I got second in the Chicago High School High Jump and first in the quarter mile--got all the points for my high school and placed them pretty well.

TS Do you remember what you would high jump back then? Do you have any idea what it was--what your--

HF I high jumped over my head!

TS Oh, yes?

HF Oh, I don't know. It was maybe 5'11" maybe 6 feet. It was up in there somewhere. It was pretty darned good because I never had any coaching.

TS Did they offer scholarships at all for college in track at that time?

HF At that time we would have said, "What's a scholarship?" No, actually I never got a cent, except for hamburgers when I was competing in track. I got plenty of free train rides, but that's all.

You were asking about during the war time. As I said earlier, I went to Crane College just after I graduated from high school in June of 1918. At that time there was an army service called the Student Army Training Corps. It was called the SATC, or the people who were in it called it "Stick Around 'Til Christmas." But I was only seventeen. I didn't get to be eighteen until after the Armistice was signed, and I frankly didn't want to enlist. Well, the SATC had units in most of the universities and colleges over the country. It was rather unusual to have it in a junior college, but since the junior college had a lot of men in it, it was quite a good-sized college, so they put one in this college. About two miles, a mile and a half from the college building, there was an old grade school which had been abandoned. It used to be where we went to take our carpenter work when I was in grade school. They took that over and pulled out all the seats of the Marquette School and put in cots in there in all the rooms. So, we slept in this school. We marched from the school for the mile, mile and a quarter, whatever it was, to our classes in the Crane College; and we had one distinction that we had an athletic field for our use.

The athletic field was the former Chicago Cubs' baseball park, which was more or less half way between the two buildings. We had only a football team at that time, but we had that for a drill field. They'd march down after class in the afternoon. Boys would drill, and the football team would practice. Well, that sounded like a good thing to me. I had never played football before, but I went out for football at that time. I never drilled a darned step in the SATC! I used to spend all my time drilling for football. We had one lieutenant who was football-conscious. He used to take his platoon, after marching around,

HF

he'd march down to the end where we were playing football, and he'd say, "At ease." Then, they'd all just watch us practice. That is unusual about the Cubs' Park because they used to be called "The Chicago West Side Park," and it was a wooden stadium. About 1915 a new league tried to form, called the Federal League, and they had the Chicago Whales. And they built Woodland Park on the north side of Chicago. Then, the league flopped, and I don't know what happened to the other teams in the league, but the Chicago Cubs bought Woodland Park. It became Wrigley Field.

And that's why where we were at that particular time was the only time that that could have been used as an athletic field, but it was that particular time. Actually, that field now is the University of Illinois Medical Center where they have their medical schools and dental schools and all that, about a ten-story building where we used to go cavorting around playing football. I was tried out because I had a good running capacity. I was tried out in the backfield, but my eyes were so bad that they would likely throw a ball to me, and I wouldn't even see it coming and lose it. So, the alumnus who was our coach said, "You don't belong in the backfield at all. You'd better get in the line." And, having no practice, I went where the dumbskulls were. I was a guard in the line. We had two guards, both of us were about one hundred and fifty pounds, and we were playing against some pretty heavy people.

Our manager--we didn't know this until later on--he called up Coach Amos Alonzo Stagg at the University of Chicago, a famous coach, and he said, "How would you like to have a practice game with Crane College?" I imagine that Stagg said, "What the heck is Crane College?" But we didn't hear that. He said--he told us to come over on Wednesday afternoon, and we would play against the University of Chicago team.

We went over and in about an hour's time we got beat 55 to nothing, or thereabouts. And that was to be expected, but there's a sequel to that because at that time the various army camps had their own football field, at times, and players. They kept taking SATC fellows that were good, and they'd transfer them to their thing so later in the season Amos Alonzo Stagg had lost half of his players, and our manager called up again and said, "Do you want to play again?" And he said, "Yes." This time we played the same amount of time, and we were 0 to 0 against Stagg! So, they said--this is maybe apocryphal--but they said Stagg said, "Let's stop this before they score on us!"

Well, I played two years of football at Crane College. The second year we had a fellow playing center, and he quit. Whether he got sick or something, I don't know, but Wednesday afternoon they said, "You're the center from now on."

I said, "I'd never passed the ball from center."

And they said, "You're it!" But we went to--we no longer had the Cubs' field. We had to practice at ... Park, just an outside football field, and nobody brought the ball out.

Well, how are you going to play center if you don't have any ball? They stuffed sweaters in a helmet, and I passed that helmet for

HF practice for the first game. The sequel to that is--the first game was against Bourbonnais--no, it was at Bourbonnais against St. Viator's, which was a Catholic College in Joliet. Frankly, they were a four year college, and we were a two year college. And they were a lot better than we were. We finally stopped them before they got to about the ten yard line, and then we stopped them. That was wonderful for Crane. I got the ball--the first time I ever passed in a game. I passed it way over the punter's head... out of the football field. ... will forget that. They beat us about forty to nothing. That was all.

TS Did you play football when you went to the University of Illinois then?

HF I didn't even try. In the first place, I'm handicapped, and I have been ever since I was in about the second grade, by wearing glasses. I was never that much interested. In the first place, I knew I was no good. I was all right in a junior college, but not in a regular university or even in a regular college, as far as that goes. So then, well actually, in my first year at the college the track coach and the soccer coach--oh, back up, it was my last year in high school--the track coach and the soccer coach were one and the same fellow. He said to me, "You'd be a lot wiser if you'd take--do soccer in the fall because it would help your run."

And I went out for soccer. I didn't find out until later on that he had ten men out on the team, and he was trying to find one more man to make the team! I was that one man. Actually, he did get two men. There was a colored boy and myself, and we were both lousy. We both played halfback, and if he put one of us in the first half--you know in those days you couldn't change at any time, you had to change right at the half. That was it. And if he put one of us in the first half, we'd be so lousy that he'd take us out for the second half and put the other one in. The next game he might reverse it. We never played a full game because we were both so darned lousy that--but we made our letters. That was another sport that I was in.

TS Yes.

Did you run track then at the University of Illinois?

RF I went down there with the intention of running track. Now that sounds funny, but I finagled my two and a half years--well, actually when I went down--the first year I thought I'd make it in two years, but after I found that I'd need two and a half--and in those days you had to spend a whole year before you were eligible. Nowadays, these fellows go down, and as freshmen they run right away. But, literally, you had to spend a full year, if you transferred from one school to another, or if you were a freshman. Freshmen couldn't compete in those days. So, I finagled it so that I would have two years of track and also have the full year's time before I was--while I wasn't eligible to compete.

I remember my first year at Illinois, which was supposedly my junior year in college. They had a big to-do in those days in the fall called "A Fall Circus, " where they had dancers and trapeze men. They also had

HF fraternity relay races. And the Gamma Phi Beta Sorority had contacted a friend of mine to get up a team which was to run for their sorority. And he got me--that was two, and we needed four. Another sorority had gotten the same distance. They had two men, and they couldn't get any more. So, we flipped up for it, and the Gamma Phi Betas won. So, I was on their team. We won, and one of the rather peculiar things about it was that of those four men, two of them were later on the 1924 Olympic Team. Another later played professional baseball. That's Kaiser.

TS Just out of a pick-up!

HF The regular trackmen were allowed to compete except if they were first, they were disqualified; but if they were--now this fellow that--see, now I wasn't on the team yet, so I could do anything I wanted to. This other fellow was a hurtler, and he competed in the '24 Olympics in the hurtles.

And then in the spring of that year--no, I can't remember--anyway, it was my second year after I got qualified. I was out for track, and at that time I had gotten down to running the quarter mile. As a second effort I ran the 220, and we were taking a team down to New Orleans and Austin, Texas, and Dallas for Easter vacation. We had two meets down there, and in order to make the team, there were two of us that had to run the quarter mile. We won the quarter mile race. This was at home. We made the team, and the other fellow stayed home. I was just lucky enough to beat him, and so I got to go down there. The first place I ever ran for the University of Illinois was at the University of Texas stadium in Austin, Texas. It made me feel quite good because I hadn't competed for Illinois anywhere else before then.

TS How did you do?

HF Oh, I don't remember. I mean--I was--there was one other quarter-miler who was just a step better than me, and for two years I was behind him--one step. And then we ran the relay. If you mean the team, we beat the University of Texas by a hundred and something to twelve or some such thing. We ran in the rain. It wasn't the stadium they have there now; it was a wooden stadium.

Well, let's go on. I can talk about the first two years. In the Middle West the chief relay carnival was the "Drake Relays," which came the last weekend of April every year at Des Moines, Iowa, University of Drake, Drake University. I was the fourth best man on two teams: the half mile relay which we all ran one-eighth of a mile and the mile relay which we all ran one-fourth of a mile. The first year I was on the team we won both of those races, and a year later in the 1923 Drake Relays we repeated except that we didn't quite win both races. Iowa beat us in the mile relay, and we still won the half mile. The reason we lost the mile relay was because Eric Wilson, who was a very fine quarter-miler from Iowa, was anchorman, and he beat us in that. I say that because he also was on the 1924 Olympic Team and a very good friend of mine.

So, in four races at Drake, Illinois won three--of which I was a member of the team, and got second in the other one. We also--I went there

HF after I graduated from Illinois. In 1924 they had a special race which was billed as a forerunner of the 1924 Olympics; of course, the Olympics were coming just about three months later. They put Eric Wilson and me together as just a two-man race, and Eric Wilson beat me again. But he didn't beat me in the Olympics.

TS Were there other like "Big Ten" competitions or anything like that at the time?

HF Oh, yes. They had indoor and outdoor Big Ten competitions. In 1923 we had our meet at Northwestern University at what is called Patton Gym. I think they have a bigger gym now, but that was a rather small one. The turns were sharp, and I had always had very long strides which makes it very hard to go around turns. I was running the relay at Patton Gym, and I'll be darned if I didn't run right off the track! ...was out of it because he never did pick up... so I feel that I had something to do with that disaster.

In the outdoor meet at Michigan in 1923--in other words just before we graduated--we were in the meet there at Michigan and coming into the relay at the end of the meet. Illinois was ahead, if they won the relay, which everybody said they would; but if Michigan could get third place, they would get enough points to be ahead. We had two new quarter-milers. They were--actually they weren't college quality at that time. A little later they became that. But in 1924 it was darned hard to get four really good quarter-milers at one college! Now, because of scholarships, they're able to do that. So, in those days they ran all ten teams at the same time. Nowadays, they have them in two heats, and they they don't try--they just take times. But these two fellows that were just really mediocre quarter-milers, when I saw this fellow coming up to me to pass the baton--he was in the middle of the pack of ten fellows! He was about fifth or sixth there; and I don't know, the only thing I thought of was how am I going to get by those five or six fellows in front of me? I got the baton without any trouble and went around--it was a quarter mile track--the first ten just keeping behind those five men. Soon as the straightaway, I wasn't thinking about whether I'd finish or not, I was thinking about getting ahead. I went right down the track. When we came to the next turn, the "M" (?) turn, I was in front. I looked and went around the turn, and I never thought about tying up which is what most quarter-milers do.

Probably I would have if I'd thought about it, but I saw our team captain, who was the one-step man. He kept always just one-step ahead of me in competition, a good friend of mine, and here he was dancing up and down. I thought if I can get to him first, I know he'll be able to win the thing. I did get to him first, and he did win it. And the only difficulty was that Michigan got third. The final score was 52½ points to 52! Can you imagine that? And Michigan won it. I mean won the meet by a half point.

TS Did you have a training program? Did you have a coach? What kind of training did you do for the quarter-miler?

HF Well, I suppose at that time it was completely uniform. Yes, we had a very fine coach. We didn't have any training program where we pulled on weights or got on a bicycle thing or anything like that. Nothing

HF like that in those days, but our coach told us just exactly what to do each day and we did it.

TS What would you do on a week's schedule?

HF Well, I suppose on Monday we might run a full-scale quarter mile, not full speed. And, then, because most of the quarter-milers were on a relay team and some of them were sprinters, they would practice sprinting. We'd spend an awful lot of time passing the baton, which I don't think nowadays is done. They just assume you can pass a baton, but there is a real technique to it. And, then, maybe in the middle of the week we'd have a competition between ourselves and run all-out--probably not as fast as we would in a race, but still all-out. That was about the way we'd do it, and we did a lot of what they call nowadays "windsprints." We'd start at the end of a straightaway on a track and just go down as fast as we could and then slow up and then come back the opposite way. I used to like to go back over where my spikes were because I found out that my stride was better--longer than all of the other fellows on the quarter-mile team.

TS So, you studied the track while you ran?

RF Well, I studied it afterwards, and I voluntarily tried to lengthen my stride. I always have had a good stride.

TS How long a stride did you have?

HF Well, I think it was something like ten feet, I don't know. So, that's about what we'd do.

TS We're going to lose tape here now. We're going to turn the tape over.

Begin Tape A, Side 2

TS Go ahead.

HF In 1923, after we had finished our college year and got our diplomas, we were still qualified to compete in the NCAA Track Meet. I have a medal from there. Frankly, I can't remember what I got, but it was either--I think it was third place nationally. I'm not quite positive of that. And that was all I had in connection with college training.

In the summer of 1923 I was working for the Chicago Union Station Company. At that time there wasn't any station, or rather there was a station there that had been built in the 1870's and was still being used. But they were building a new station, and the station at that time was nothing more than two basements down, no building at all. As an aside, I stayed there four years, and when I got through, the station was eight stories high and was completely in use.

But to go back to 1923, a friend of mine, a fellow quarter-miler from Northwestern called me up and said, "How would you like to go to Toronto?" I said, "Fine, what's at Toronto?" He said, "If you'll join the Chicago Athletic Association, they'll send you to Toronto for a track meet up there."

HF Well, actually, there are two track meets--athletic clubs in Chicago. There were then, and they're still there now though nowadays they don't actually compete in athletics. The Chicago Athletic Association and the Illinois Athletic Club. They were on Michigan Boulevard, a block apart and hated rivals of each other. Whitey Hagen (Sp.?) from Northwestern had been propositioned and joined the Chicago Athletic Association, and he said, "I can take you to Doc Derwent (Sp.), the coach, and he'll put you on the list for the Chicago Athletic Association.

I said, "Fine, I'll go down with you and meet Doc Derwent." And I did just that, and so they sent us to--I think it was some sort of a National Canadian Meet in Toronto, Canada. We made a fiesta out of it. They sent us to Buffalo. We went to Niagara Falls; we went on the "Maid of the Mist." And we took a steamboat across to Toronto. We won our meets in Toronto, and everything was fine.

Later on, the National Championships for the AAU, Amateur Athletic Union, which was then the big-time of non-college track, was held at Stagg Field at the University of Chicago. I competed there with Whitey Hagen, and I was fortunate enough to win the National Championship in '23, which was a pretty good start. The time was very bad, but it was all right. So, from then on I competed for the Chicago Athletic Association, and they sent me all over the country. I had the honor of competing in the original Madison Square Garden--the year before it was torn down. There's a big department store in New York that has--what is the name of that place?

TS Macy's?

HF No, no. They have a track meet every year. I competed in that I don't know when.

TS Wanamaker? No, that's a mile.

HF Wanamaker Mile is in that meet, but I don't--it isn't the name.

TS Penrose or--

HF Well, it doesn't make--

TS We know what you're talking about though.

HF It's a big meet. It was then, and it certainly is still now. They compete every year in Madison Square Garden, but the year I was there was the last year that they had it in the old Garden. It was a shambles even then! Then, they tore it down. And that's the one place I got a medal which had a genuine diamond in it. I later gave the diamond to my wife, and she--I should say gave the medal to my wife, and she wore it as sort of a trinket for a number of years. And we competed all over. I've competed in Louisville, in Washington D.C., in Philadelphia, and later on in San Francisco so--

TS And this was all while you were working, too, wasn't it?

HF Yes.

TS How did all of that work out?

HF It depended if you had a boss who liked athletics. There was no question. And I did! I mean, he said, "Yes, you can take time off." I'd have to get somebody else to take my job for a couple of days, and so we competed right up to--through the winter, went to Milwaukee one time and just came within a tenth of a second of breaking the world's record for indoor quarter of a mile because it was on a track which was banked about like that. Boy, you could make time if you had good long legs! You didn't have to worry about running off the track. You could just let out.

As you know, the 1924 Olympics were in Paris, France, in July of that year. Instead of having a number of meets as they do nowadays, which cut the field down, they had just one meet at Boston--at the Harvard University Stadium in Boston. The way we worked it, we would be working full time, an eight hour day. Monday and Tuesday get off; get on the train, Wednesday; arrive in Boston on Thursday; and compete on Friday in the preliminaries. I was fortunate to get second in my primary heat. I was leading the whole thing until Court Taylor (Sp.?) came whizzing by out of nowhere and passed me right at the finish. So, we got first and second, Court Taylor and myself. The same thing practically finished the meet for us on Saturday. I was again leading. I'd taken first place and was leading until Court Taylor again passed me and finished first, and I got second again. Nobody knew who was going to be picked for the finals--rather for the team--though we knew that at least four quarter-milers would go because we had to have a relay team. As it worked out, eight men were taken to Paris. They had four men who were to run the individual event, 400 meters, and four men to run the relay, which wasn't necessary, but it gave twice as many men the chance to go over, which I thought was fine.

We sat around the hotel in Boston after the meet, waiting to see who would be put up on the bulletin board as having made the team, not that we were personally worried because we were in the fourth best quarter-milers. The following Sunday we took the train down to New York City and stayed overnight at a hotel in New York. Early Monday morning they took us across on the ferry to Hoboken, and there was an ocean liner there. On the sides was painted "American Olympic Teams." That, of course, gave us a thrill, and we got on the boat--the first time that most of us had ever been on an ocean liner. We thought it was real big compared to the Queen Elizabeth or something like that. It was rather a small ocean liner, but it was still one that had been across the ocean a number of times. And, in fact, historically, it had been one of the ships which had been interned during the first World War because it was a German ship, and then when the United States got in the war, it was taken over by the United States and was used to carry troops across and even more to bring troops back after the Armistice--same vessel. We spent a day or two just getting acquainted with the ship. It was really thrilling for landlubbers like we were.

I think the first thing to do, and then if you'll follow this, are you ready?

TS M-hm.

HF The ship was called "The America." It had originally been "Amerika" with a "k" at the end instead of the "c," but it was now the "U.S.S. America." We got on--when I say "we" I mean all of the Olympic teams that were going to Paris. That included in the first place the track and field team; in the second place the swimming team and as a part of that swimming team was the American Swimming Team--the girls--the Women's Swimming Team. Also the wrestling team, the boxing team--these were all men, and, of course, the gymnastics team. I think that was about all that were on the ship, but the coaches, there were lots and lots of coaches. It seemed like every coach had to take his wife with him and maybe his kids, I don't know! So, there were a lot of civilians along.

MB You mentioned the swimming team, too, and I was reading in this somewhere--who was on the swimming team there?

HF Well, of course, as of nowadays, the one swimmer that everybody should know was Johnny Weissmuller. He later became famous as Tarzan, but he was not a movie actor at that time. He was just a darned good swimmer. And Duke Kahanamoku, who was a Hawaiian, was also on the team. They were about on a par, and they competed with themselves in the swimming. There were women swimmers. The most famous was Gertrude Ederle, although she wasn't famous at that time. If you don't remember, Gertrude Ederle in 1926 was the first woman to swim the English Channel.

MB That's about all the women athletes that there were. Wasn't it just the swimmers?

HF Yes. There were the tennis teams--the tennis team--Helen Wills Moody, but they got snooty for some reason and went over on some other boat. We never saw them.

The track and field--they had not put women's track and field in the Olympic program at that time. It came four years later at Amsterdam, but we had no women track and field persons.

TS How did you train on board the ship?

HF Training on board the ship was the real problem because they had no gym as such; they had no swimming tank. The ship on the upper deck you could promenade completely around the ship. What they did was to put fiber netting completely around the upper deck, and we ran on that with gym shoes type of shoes. If we wanted to, for instance, pass the baton, we would have to yell "Sprinters coming" or something like that because people were promenading on the same place where we were supposed to be running, so that we just jogged around the complete deck. We sprinted on one side up and down as much as we could.

The people who had the peculiar situation were the swimmers. They had no swimming tank on the ship, and they built a tank about fifteen or sixteen feet square and maybe four or five feet deep of canvas that had been waterproofed. You'd say how could anybody swim in a fifteen

- HF foot tank? But they did. They put on a harness on their shoulders and then tied a rope to the harness. They had a couple of their teammates hold the rope, and they swam against the rope in a fifteen foot tank. And that applied to both men and women. The trackmen used to enjoy going up there just to watch them training, and they did a good job, too.
- TS Was this ship just for the Olympic Team, or was it also carrying other passengers?
- HF Going over, it was just for the Olympic Team and the coaches, and maybe they had a few passengers otherwise. But coming back--this is getting ahead--but to answer your question, coming back, so many athletes had been offered trips to Stockholm or Rome or someplace to compete that the ship was only about a half full. So, coming back, about half of the ship were just ordinary passengers.
- TS Why don't you go through some of those pictures and tell us something about them? Why don't you slide them over.
- HF These two men, Gus Pope and Tom Leep (Sp.?) were both weightlifters, or weight men anyway, and they were my roommates. We had a small cabin. I don't see how two big men like them plus myself, who was not too small, were in one room, but we managed it some way.
- MB You started out with a few more than that, didn't you, in that room going over?
- HF No, these were the only two. Coming back, we had more room, and I tell people that I had a private room with Frieda (Sp.?). I don't tell them that Harry Frieda was a shot-putter from Chicago, but Harry and I had a good time coming back.
- MB Did you have any set schedule of activities? Did they keep you on some kind of training schedule on the way over?
- HF I don't think we had any particular schedule. The fact that you're on a boat and that your meals were scheduled so you either ate them when they were there, or you didn't get them; and we did have a bedtime, I'm sure of that. But, I'm sure also that we had a scheduled time to practice. I think we practiced both morning and afternoon, but not long.
- TS If you see anything you want to make a comment on, Ray, as far as the pictures go, please do.
- HF No, these are just usual, I guess.
- TS How did you happen to come by so many photographs in this album?
- HF It was a thing of the time. I mean in the early twenties everybody carried cameras. They were all black and white, you remember, but I'd say at least half of the athletes on the boat had a camera, includ-

HF ing me. And we would sign up on the back of a photograph, and the fellow would have one printed and give it to us and so on. We exchanged photographs in other words, and then, when we got to the Olympic Stadium, there was a sort of a little shop there where they had photographs of the previous day's events. I don't mean that they just had them for a day before, but if you wanted a picture, you could almost invariably get it at the shop in the Olympic Village without any....

TS Were those professional?

HF Those were professional photographers, yes.

There's a picture here of Charlie Paddock (Sp.), who at that time we called "The World's Fastest Human." I don't know whether people nowadays remember that name at all, but he was very famous in those days the way these sprinters are from the Olympics of 1924. And a very nice fellow. He was from California, and unfortunately he didn't win. He was supposed to win the Olympics in '24. He placed, but he didn't win, and he later was killed in a plane crash in Alaska.

MB Pat McDonald (Sp.)--he was supposedly the biggest person there. What was he? Or, who was he?

HF Pat McDonald was a New York policeman, a typical type of New York policeman. As you say, he was probably the biggest man on the Olympic Team. He was a weight-lifter, I believe. I don't remember exactly what he did, but I think it was weight-lifting. And McGrath is--I don't remember what his first name is--was also a New York policeman. He was older, he had gray hair, but he was coming back to at least his second Olympic Games. He was also a weight man.

And this man is Avery Brundage who was an University of Illinois alumnus and was at that time on the American Olympic Committee. People nowadays remember him as being the International Olympics President, and he had a lot of controversy about him. Actually, the only thing you could say about Avery Brundage was that he wanted the Olympic Games to be amateur. He didn't like the idea of professional games. And they're trying to get them professional more and more nowadays. He was the one that fought that for years and years. I'm afraid he's not going to win, but he died a few years ago as you may remember.

MB He was in the Olympics in 1912. What did he--?

HF He was in the '12 Olympics, and I can't think offhand what he did. I think maybe a shot-putter or a javelin-thrower. He was a big, powerful man, and I'm pretty certain that it was a field event.

These are pictures of various teams from the Big Ten. There are the four of us with Avery Brundage, all being from Illinois. Ohio State. Is this Iowa?

TS Any famous names in those pictures? Besides yours?